

学校编码: 10384 分类号__密级__

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廈門大學

碩 士 論 文

Wearing Colored Glasses

戴有色眼镜

—A Study on Language and Metaphor in Mu Zimei's

Love Letters Left Behind

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论文提交日期: 2014 年 4 月 1 日

论文答辩时间: 2014 年 5 月 23 日

学位授予日期:

答辩委员会主席: __

评阅人: __

2014 年 4 月

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中 文 摘 要

本论文主要针对木子美的《遗情书》文学内容进行研究。在 2003 年被审查之前, 木子美现象引起了中国广大网民的极大反响, 可谓赞誉皆有。本文将不会对该现象引起的反应进行研究, 也不会试图给这种事件贴上性权益、女权、产权等标签, 反之, 本文将关注木子美的博客本身, 并分析她的语言使用。隐喻是如何在现代与性相关的词汇中进行使用, 来使得“性”在中国正常化? 英语如何在现代中文俚语中起作用? 隐秘的性词汇是如何阻碍女性用积极的方式来表达她们的性感受? 为什么大部分正常人无法评估和表达他们自身的性感受或者甚至其行为? 那些轻蔑贬低的措辞能得以改善么? 中文本身的视觉特性是否阻碍了彻底的改革? 以一种缩小隐喻和文化偏见的方式来看待性, 会带来哪些好处? 我引用了 Foucault 关于力量的理论来应对上述问题。我将分析木子美的语言使用, 并以展现木子美的语言技术如何能被用来修补中文的性词汇来结尾。

关键词: 中国的博客; 性词汇; 审查制度; 语言决定论

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this study is Mu Zimei's *Love Letters Left Behind* as a literary text. The Mu Zimei phenomenon caught the attention of millions of Chinese netizens before its censorship in 2003, yielding varying degrees of acclaim and vilification. Instead of analyzing the reactions to the 'phenomenon' and trying to label the phenomenological event as writing about sexual rights, women's rights, property rights, etc. I will look at the hard copy of Mu Zimei's blog itself, and analyze her use of language. How is metaphor used in the modern sexual vocabulary to normalize sexuality in China? How does the English language function in modern Chinese slang? How does the 'cryptic' sexual vocabulary make it difficult for women to express their sexuality in a sex-positive way? Why is it that 'Most ordinary people are unable to evaluate and express their own sexual feelings, or even their behavior'? Can pejorative terms be ameliorated, or does the visual nature of the Chinese language resist radical reinterpretation? What are the possible benefits of looking at sexuality in a way that tries to minimize metaphor and cultural bias? I use Foucault's theories on Power to tackle the above questions. I will analyze how language is used in Muzimei, and finish by showing how Mu Zimei's techniques can be used to revamp the Chinese sexual vocabulary.

Key words: Blogging in China; sexual vocabulary; censorship;
linguistic determinism

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戴有色眼镜

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Tea With A Sexologist

August 18, 2013 8:44pm

Summer of 2013, a 28 year old philosophy student biked from Shanghai to Tongli to visit the only Museum of Chinese Sexual History in the world. After browsing the museum, the student was lucky enough to interview prolific sexologist and curator Liu Dalin, and ask him a few questions.

“Mr. Liu, have you ever heard of the Mu Zimei Phenomenon? Or of Mu Zimei, the ‘mother of Chinese sex blogging’,¹ ‘the woman condemned by the entire country,’² whose blog was censored and shut down in 2003? She had millions of followers at one point.”

“Of course, everyone heard of it, back then.”

“Well, I’m writing a masters thesis on Mu Zimei’s *Love Letters Left Behind* (遗情书). Have you read it?”

“No, the blog, it was a matter of exposing (暴露) herself for fame. I have not read it.”

“You know, sociologist Li Yinhe also hadn’t read *Love Letters Left Behind*, but she still wrote an essay called “How I see the Mu Zimei phenomenon,” because she viewed Mu’s blog as an example of expanding sexual rights in China.³ Many people have written about the ‘Mu Zimei phenomenon,’ but are you aware of any researchers

¹ Jacobs, Katrien. *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet*. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2012. 91. Print.

²Farrer, James. "China's Women Sex Bloggers and Dialogic Sexual Politics on the Chinese Internet." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs - China Aktuell* 36.4 (2007): 14. *Policyinnovations.org*. 14 Sept. 2009. Web.

³ Ibid. 14

or sexologists who have approached *Love Letters Left Behind* as a text meriting intellectual investigation?"

"No. I don't know if academics are studying that area."

"Well, ok. Let me explain myself. In 1996, Pan Suiming analyzed 11 social surveys on sexuality in Chinese cities between 1986 and 1995, and he made a list of ten factors identified as affecting sexological research and studies in China⁴."

"Sure. Big, big study."

"Here is number one on his list of factors affecting sex research in China:

1: 'For most people, the Chinese sexual vocabulary is either cryptic or considered dirty and abusive.' And, um,

4: 'Many tragic or socially illegitimate sexual matters would rather be forgotten than discussed with the interviewees.'

Actually, I read an article, this farmer Dai Qingcheng from Anhui who was sentenced to death for raping 116 women between 1993 and 2009, the victims were reluctant to go to the police, they finally caught the rapist, but he was at it a long time.⁵"

"I read that too."

"Ah, ok. Here's a Pan Suiming quote that I think resonates with the Anhui serial-rapist story, and helps explain how the number of rapes could possibly have been so high, and possibly why the rapist wasn't caught sooner:

'reluctance is quite understandable, since they are disadvantaged by their position as women in Chinese society. If they wanted to talk about sex-related issues in public, they would need the unconditional support of their family, parents, husbands, and friends. For, despite the significant changes that have occurred in Chinese society, when you speak out about sex, people still immediately presume that you must be morally suspect. It therefore takes a lot of courage for Chinese women to talk openly about their own particular sexual preferences and attitudes⁶.'"

⁴ Francoeur, Robert T., Raymond J. Noonan, Fang-fu Ruan, and M.P. Lau. "The Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality." *CCIES*. N.p., 2004. Web.
<<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/ccies/cn.php>>.

⁵ "Serial Rapist Appeals His Death Sentence." *China.org.cn*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2011. Web.
<http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-04/19/content_22391986.htm>.

⁶ Suiming, Pan. "Gary Sigley and Elaine Jeffreys - On "Sex" and "Sexuality" in China: A Conversation with Pan

“So what does this all have to do with Mu Zimei? Why are you writing your thesis on *Love Letters Left Behind*?”

“Well, as Mr. Li Yinhe said,
*women have been seen as victims in relation to sexuality. This is the case in China. Women are considered vulnerable like children, and the words ‘women and children’ are often casually linked together, for example the state organization, ‘The Commission for Protection of Women and Children’. Women and their sexuality are often seen as in need of protection. Women’s sexual desires are overlooked, while issues such as sexual harassment generate broad interest...The underlying logic is that women are victims of, not partners in, sexual activity.*⁷

“I think Mu Zimei is a big break from the cryptic vocabulary that Mr. Pan is referring to, and I think Mu Zimei uses Chinese in a sex-positive way to describe her views on sexuality, and her blog is a worthy educational tool in an environment where sex is ‘discussed’ almost entirely in physiological terms. Millions of netizens responded to the Mu Zimei phenomenon as a form of sexual rights. Netizens classified, validated and vilified Mu’s writing through the lens of social progress, natural rights, women’s rights, free speech rights, legal rights, property rights, as citizen responsibilities, and so on.⁸ Despite the wide-spread impact of the blog, I think some of the nuance, like Mu’s use of language has been overlooked. This actually ties well into number 8 on Pan Suiming’s list of factors:

8: ‘Most ordinary people are unable to evaluate and express their own sexual feelings, or even their behavior.’

But Muzi is far from an ordinary person, and the way she uses language is worth careful analysis. I’m sure not saying Muzimei is perfect, or we should copy her lifestyle, but... Mu Zimei’s use of language in *Love Letters Left Behind* shows how sexuality can be discussed without the heavy cultural normative viewpoint of the

Suiming." Interview by Gary Sigley and Elaine Jeffreys. *Criticalasianstudies.org*. N.p., Jan. 1999. Web. <<http://criticalasianstudies.org/assets/files/bcas/v31n01.pdf>>.

⁷ Li, Yinhe. "Sexual Pleasure Empowers Women!: Response To Susie Jolly." *contestations.net*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.contestations.net/issues/issue-2/sexual-pleasure-empowers-women-response-to-susie-jolly-4/>>

⁸ Farrer 11-25

Chinese language, and by freeing Mandarin in this way, she uses language as a means of reclaiming sexual power.

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1 thoughts on “戴有色眼镜”

1.  [Dave](#)

[February 27, 2014 at 9:00 pm](#)

Hi thanks for that post! I think it's good to end posts with a bang, something that folks will really think about and will bring them back to your blog over and over. You should start your essay now!

[Reply](#)

0.1 Academic Summary of the Mu Zimei Phenomenon

In the above ‘blog,’ I emulated Mu Zimei’s method of transferring information by writing a somewhat fictionalized account of my interview with Liu Dalin. For fear that the background information on Mu Zimei was too informal for some readers, here is a succinct, well-written, academic summary of Mu Zimei:

“In June 19, 2003, a 25 year-old Guangzhou magazine editor Li Li began posting a diary of her numerous love affairs on the Chinese internet site Blogcn.com, using the penname Mu Zimei. At first her blog received little notice except from her friends. Then in August she posted an account of her one-night affair with Wang Lei a rock star from Guangzhou, including his real name (Wan 2003). By October, her page was receiving over 6,000 hits a day making it the most popular personal blog ever in China (Jinyangwang 2003a). On November 11, 2004, three major internet news sites published articles on Mu Zimei (Wang 2003). Daily hits to her blog reached 110,000, and for a short time the “Mu Zimei phenomenon” was the most talked-about topic on the Chinese internet (Chinadaily.com 2003a). 20 million visitors reportedly accessed her diary on one day on Sina.com (Pomfret 2003). ...The Mu Zimei blog was shut down, ostensibly because of the heavy traffic, but also its controversial sexual content. The Ministry of Propaganda banned publication of Li Li’s diary in book form and prohibited her from publishing under either her penname Mu Zimei or given name Li Li. According to the interview with Li Li, Chinese media were banned from publishing interviews with her, and she was fired from her job as a magazine editor⁹.”

In this paper, I want to explore how the Chinese sexual vocabulary operates in MuZiMei’s *Love Letters Left Behind*. Most Chinese know of the standard dismissive and vague sexual vocabulary, but *Love Letters Left Behind* allows us to observe the Chinese language at work, discussing sex in a thorough, uncompromising manner. Mu

⁹ Farrer, 10

Zimei hopes to demystify sex, as she states in one of her opening posts, ‘I can’t even speak in metaphor, I speak very directly(我连比喻都不会，说的特直接).’ Muzi’s direct way of speaking is at odds with how the language is commonly used, and I will give a detailed analysis of the text and explore the benefits of looking at sexuality without the entrapments of metaphor and historic prejudice. This is not a paper supporting linguistic determinism, but rather exploring the possible benefits of a revised sexual vocabulary.

0.2 Research Goals and Methods

This study is focused on Mu Zimei’s *Love Letters Left Behind*, the blog that made blogging really popular in China. My primary focus in this study is the how Mu Zimei uses various language techniques to break out of the normal silence on sexuality and start a nationwide discussion on alternative forms of sexuality. I chose to focus on Mu not mainly for her popularity and impact but for the untapped potential of the linguistic and literary techniques she uses to express herself. While researching the Mu Zimei phenomenon and *Love Letters Left Behind*, I hoped to gain answers to the following questions. How does the ‘cryptic’ sexual vocabulary make it difficult for women to express their sexuality in a sex-positive way? How is metaphor used in the modern sexual vocabulary to normalize sexuality in China? How can sexual education be expanded beyond high school physiology classes and Japanese pornography to include discussions on morality? Why is it that ‘Most ordinary people are unable to evaluate and express their own sexual feelings, or even their behavior’? Can pejorative terms be ameliorated, or does the visual nature of the Chinese language resist radical reinterpretation? What are the possible benefits of looking at sexuality in a way that tries to minimize metaphor and cultural bias?

To answer these questions I have used researched various written sources and translated sections of *Love Letters Left Behind*. This study employed a wide range of source materials including blogs, online responses, novels, a personal interview with sexologist Liu Dalin, a visit to Liu Dalin’s Museum of Sexual History, articles, academic essays, edited collections with fantastic titles, such as *As Normal As*

Possible. I also use my personal four years of experience living in Xiamen, Ningbo, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Changshu, etc to make comments on the general (absolutely not comprehensive) use of Mandarin, meaning, not just Mandarin in academic articles, but how Mandarin is spoken by non-academics in various parts of China. Also, translating *Love Letters Left Behind* has enhanced my knowledge of how the modern sexual vocabulary is used, and the long process also encouraged me to study for and eventually pass the HSK5 test, so that I would be more qualified to use and make observations on Mandarin.

My three years of experience as a student and researcher of the Chinese sexual vocabulary has led me to alter my approach to this thesis a few times. While initially curious as to *why* Chinese today are famously shy to talk about sex, which led me to research the historical influence of Zhu Xi's *Four Classics for Women* compilation, Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophy, sexuality during the Cultural Revolution and other historical topics, I eventually found myself believing the more useful question was not *why* but *how* Chinese are shy to talk about sex. This led me on a more linguistic route, using Susan Sontag, Michel Foucault, and feminist theory as my guides to explore how the Chinese language—and how logographic language, via visual means—influences behavior. This study also benefits from the amount of scholarship and casual internet articles on sexual education in China, and articles on the effects of Japanese pornography and the idealization of the submissive Confucian woman on Chinese people today.

Through my research, I have found that blogging in China is connected to simple pleasures, but also has political significance in terms of rights to self-expression. Artist and activist Ai Weiwei has repeatedly encouraged use of the internet as a news source and a source of self-expression. This can be seen in young Chinese posting pictures of themselves in sexual situations online, or even Ai Weiwei's own photos that encourage the viewer to rethink nudity, sexuality, and pornography. (With more blogs by the day, there are also polarizing figures such as Furong Jiejie, who is famous mainly for being hated and jeered by netizens. This I believe is relatively unique in the Chinese community—people being famous for being famous is a global

phenomena, but people becoming famous for how much hate they generate—this seems to be a Chinese phenomena.) There is a strong form of policing on the internet, not just the 50-cent army (the thousands of people paid by the Chinese government to make and reply to posts online), but often unconscious, unreflective policing of netizens on other netizens through a normalizing, pejorative vocabulary that discourages alternative lifestyles, especially sexual lifestyles. I think it is important to understand the role language plays in the Chinese shaming culture, where the concept of ‘face(面子)’ is paramount. Especially with the upcoming gender gap crisis, along with the growing gap between rich and poor, the future may be even more conducive to incendiary, shaming vocabulary. If left unchecked and unstudied, China may continue on the current course of silent repression and inflammatory, closed-minded language, and life for those who are not ‘as normal as possible’ will become increasingly stigmatized. Conversely, if the sexual vocabulary is reevaluated, the potential for growth and more interesting discussions on sex and morality are immense.

The structure of this essay is unorthodox. To accustom the reader to Mu Zimei’s blog format, I opened with a blog entry that covered the political landscape of the modern Chinese sexual vocabulary in a casual, non-academic method. This is to show the effectiveness of transmitting information about sex in unexpected, experimental, alternative ways, as opposed to relying on academia, or what is expected. The blog format is a way of getting non-academics involved in the discussion, and acknowledging the validity of modern forms of communication and self-expression. Also, Mu Zimei’s technique of unsettling the reader can be effectively used to highlight moralities and especially terms that need conscious, careful reevaluation. After this introduction, I will continue with my first chapter, blog entry ‘Eavesdropping,’ which gives a fictionalized example of how the Chinese sexual vocabulary might be used today, analyzing etymology and history of certain terms, and showing how speakers often unconsciously say things they don’t mean, or are led by habitualized language patterns to a place they didn’t mean to go. Then, Chapter Two will begin to analyze *Love Letters Left Behind*, starting with Mu Zimei’s most

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